

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 5256

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JM

SUBJECT: NOMINATIONS COMPLETED, ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON IN EARNEST

1. CANDIDATES IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT FILED THEIR NOMINATION PAPERS ON NOVEMBER 29, THUS BRINGING THE CAMPAIGN INTO ITS FINAL STAGE. WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE NOMINATION PROCESS, WE NOW KNOW THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL BE A STRAIGHT CONTEST BETWEEN THE PEOPLES NATIONAL PARTY (PNP) AND THE JAMAICA LABOUR PARTY (JLP). BOTH PARTIES HAVE FIELDDED CANDIDATES FOR EACH OF THE 60 CONSTITUENCIES, AND THERE ARE NO MINOR PARTY OR INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES.

2. AS OF THIS MOMENT, THE PNP APPEARS TO HAVE AN EDGE. THE REASONS UNDERLYING THIS CONCLUSION ARE TWO: (A) THE APPARENT IMPACT OF THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE ELECTORAL CONSTITUENCIES AND (B) THE PRESENT SLOWDOWN IN THE JLP'S CAMPAIGNING. REGARDING THE RE-DISTRICTING, ANALYSIS OF THE 1972 VOTING PATTERN IN EACH OF THE POLLING DIVISIONS (WHICH THEMSELVES UNDERWENT NO CHANGE AS A RESULT OF THE RE-STRUCTURING) IN TERMS OF THE NEW CONSTITUENCIES, SUGGESTS (IF JAMAICANS WERE TO VOTE AS THEY DID IN THE LAST PARLIA-
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MENTARY ELECTIONS,) THE PNP WOULD WIN 76.6 PERCENT

OF THE SEATS (I.E., 46 OUT OF 60) AS COMPARED TO THE 69.8 PERCENT (I.E., 37 OUT OF 53) WHICH THEY IN FACT TOOK IN 1972. THE IMPORTANT FACT REVEALED BY THIS ANALYSIS IS THAT THE RE-STRUCTURING HAS -- UNSURPRISINGLY -- DRAWN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CONSTITUENCIES IN A MANNER WHICH ENHANCES THE PNP'S MARGIN OVER THE JLP IN TERMS OF THE 1972 VOTING PATTERN. OF COURSE, THIS FORM OF ANALYSIS DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CHANGES IN VOTER ATTITUDE SINCE THE LAST ELECTION. IT THUS OFFERS LIMITED GUIDANCE IN ASSESSING THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION. HOWEVER, IT DOES REVEAL THAT THE PNP HAS BEEN ABLE TO TAKE OUT AN ADDED MEASURE OF COMFORTING INSURANCE AGAINST THE TRADITIONAL EROSION OF SUPPORT WHICH ANY RULING PARTY MUST CONFRONT.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE JLP'S CAMPAIGNING, THE OPPOSITION SEEMS TO HAVE LOST MOMENTUM, AT LEAST COMPARED TO THE VIGOR WHICH WAS EVIDENT A FEW WEEKS AGO. IT MAY BE ONLY A "PAUSE" AS THE JLP PREPARES FOR THE LAST TWO WEEKS. IT MAY ALSO BE THAT THE JLP IS HUSBANDING ITS RESOURCES -- BOTH HUMAN AND FINANCIAL -- FOR A WHIRLWIND FINISH. (JLP SOURCES HAVE STEADILY BEMOANED THEIR PARTY'S NEED FOR MONEY). BUT, THE VERY DEFINITE LULL ALSO LEAVES A PUBLIC IMPRESSION THAT THE OPPOSITION IS TO SOME DEGREE DISPIRITED.

4. WHATEVER MAY LIE BEHIND THE PAUSE, THE JLP'S CAMPAIGN RHETORIC REMAINS AS NEGATIVE AS EVER. IT CONCENTRATES ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PNP -- WHICH IN TURN TRUMPETS ITS ACHIEVEMENTS BUT NOT THEIR COST -- BUT HAS SO FAR FAILED TO SET FORTH CONCRETE ALTERNATIVES. THIS NEGATIVISM MAY DISAPPEAR WHEN THE JLP RELEASES ITS MANIFESTO (THE DELAY IN SO DOING ADDS TO THE PARTY'S IMAGE OF IMMOBILITY), BUT TIME IS GROWING SHORT. THE NEGATIVISM WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED THE RHETORIC OF THE JLP'S CAMPAIGN -- PERHAPS BEST EXEMPLIFIED BY JLP LEADER SEAGA'S CHARGE THAT THE PNP WILL LEAD JAMAICA INTO THE CUBAN CAMP (SEE KINGSTON 5224) -- ALSO TAKES OTHER FORMS. SEAGA'S FAILURE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE "FIRING LINE" SERIES ON THE ELECTION ISSUES (REPORTED KINGSTON 5200) IS ONE OF

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THE MOST DRAMATIC. ALTHOUGH SEAGA HAS REFUTED THE CHARGE OF JAMAICA BROADCASTING CORPORATION CHAIRMAN WYCLIFFE BENNETT THAT HE NEVER REPLIED TO THE INVITATION TO APPEAR, THE FACT THAT HE (SEAGA) WAS UNWILLING TO RUN THE RISKS WHICH HIS APPEARANCE WOULD HAVE INVOLVED HAS DONE HIM AND HIS PARTY LITTLE GOOD. THE RISKS WERE REAL, GIVEN THE HOSTILITY WHICH HIS QUESTIONERS WOULD SURELY HAVE SHOWN, BUT

SEAGA'S REFUSAL TO CONFRONT DIMINISHES HIS STATURE.

5. WITH TWO WEEKS LEFT BEFORE POLLING, WE ANTICIPATE AN INTENSIFIED CAMPAIGNING BY BOTH THE JPN AND THE JLP. SO FAR THE PNP HAS CONCENTRATED ITS EFFORTS ON THE USE OF NEWSPAPERS, RADIO AND TELEVISION TO CARRY ITS MESSAGE. WE THINK THAT MORE ASSIDUOUS PERSONAL CULTIVATION OF CONSTITUENCIES WILL NOW MARK THE PNP'S EFFORTS, JUST AS IT CHARACTERIZED THE EARLIER ENDEAVORS OF THE JLP. THE INTENSIFIED CAMPAIGNING WILL INEVITABLY HEIGHTEN TENSIONS AND VIOLENCE AS DECEMBER 15 APPROACHES. NOMINATION DAY WAS MARKED BY TWO INCIDENTS WHICH ARE AN UNSETTLING PORTENT. THE JLP OFFICE IN BAILEY'S VALE, WHICH SERVES THE WEST CENTRAL ST. MARY CONSTITUENCY, WAS ATTACKED BY A GANG AND BURNED TO THE GROUND. AT THE JLP OFFICE FOR EAST CENTRAL ST. MARY IN BELLFIELD TWO WATCHMEN WERE SHOT AND KILLED. AS TO THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS, THE COUNTRY TEAM'S PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS THAT PM MANLEY AND THE PNP WILL BE RETURNED TO OFFICE; THE ONLY QUESTION IS BY WHAT POPULAR VOTE AND PARLIAMENTARY MARGIN. GERARD

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